

# The 2016 Austrian Presidential Election: A Tale of Three Divides

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## Abstract

*The 2016 Austrian presidential election was remarkably different than the previous ones in the history of the country characterized by its stable political system. Not only did it open the role of president in Austria to debate, but it also sidelined the two political parties that had dominated Austrian politics since World War II. Alexander Van der Bellen won the election with one of the closest margins in recent history. This article argues that the election divided the country in more than one way. Besides the near 50–50 divide between the candidates, the results show that it generated important dynamics in territorial politics as well, notably in the states and cities of Austria. These results point towards a party system transformation in Austrian politics.*

## Keywords

Presidential election; Austria; urban-rural divide; right-wing populism; party system transformation

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## Introduction

The election of the 12th Federal President of Austria was nothing like the previous ones. First, it put the country's characteristically stable political system under an unprecedented challenge. From the very beginning, the campaign opened the traditionally ceremonial role of Austrian presidency to debate, with threats of using the constitutional right to dissolve the parliament. After the first round of the election, it became clear that the two parties that created this stability, who had shared the presidential post between themselves since 1945, were out of the race. Second, the results of the election divided the country in various ways. Most obviously, it was one of the closest elections in the recent history, and the voters split between the two candidates in the run-off almost equally. Less than 0.5% of the registered voters decided the president. However, this article shows that there were other territorial divides as well, between the nine states of Austria as well as between urban and rural areas.<sup>1</sup>

The election took place in two rounds, on 24 April and 22 May 2016, to elect the successor of the incumbent Heinz Fischer for the next six years. The closeness of the results necessitated all the votes to be counted before it was announced on 23 May 2016 that Alexander Van der Bellen had won the election with 30,863 votes more than Norbert Hofer. For half of the Austrians and most Europeans, this result was a 'disaster narrowly averted' (The Guardian, 23 May 2016). For at least the other half of the Austrians, it was *the* disaster.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. We first describe the electoral system, including the use of absentee ballot that proved to be crucial for the results. The subsequent parts introduce candidates and their campaigns. We then present the results from the two rounds and explain how this election divided the country not only between the two candidates but also along

the lines of states and cities. Finally, the article concludes with remarks on why these results are politically significant for Austria and Europe.

## **Electoral Rules**

The rules for the presidential elections in Austria comprise common features such as the two-round voting system used elsewhere, but there are also some distinguishing features like the low voting age and highly popular absentee ballots. Austrian presidents are elected for a term of six years in a two- round voting system, where a candidate needs an absolute majority of votes to win the election. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority in the first round, then all but the two candidates receiving the most votes are eliminated before a second round takes place. The second round of voting with two candidates guarantees that one of the candidates wins the majority of the votes. Once elected and having served a term, incumbent presidents can seek re-election for a second and last term. Having already served two successive terms, the incumbent Heinz Fischer was not eligible to stand in the presidential election in 2016.

Nomination as a candidate requires 6,000 signatures from voters, which is just under 0.1% of the current Austrian electorate. This, for example, proved difficult for Robert Marschall, the leader of the EU Exit Party for Austria (*EU-Austrittspartei für Österreich*), who gathered only 1,150 signatures and therefore was unable to stand in the election. Otherwise, anyone who is eligible to vote can stand as a candidate in the presidential election, provided they are aged 35 or over on election day. Indeed, the voting age is lower in Austria than in most of the world. In 2007, Austria became the first European Union country to lower the voting age to 16 in most of their elections, including the presidential elections. Evidence from previous elections shows that lowering the voting age has ‘greatly benefited’ the Freedom Party of Austria (Luther, 2009: 1055), which

suggests that this rule might have favoured their candidate Norbert Hofer in this presidential election as well.

The absentee ballot is an increasingly popular option in the Austrian elections, allowing voters to post their ballot beforehand rather than going to the polling stations on the day of the election. This also allows Austrians living abroad to vote if they are registered with a town or village in the country. In the 2016 presidential election, 885,437 voters (13.9%) requested an absentee ballot for the second round. As the postal ballot can be returned up until the afternoon on the election day, they are counted separately on the following day. Therefore, the absentee ballot delays the announcement of the results by one day and can change the results in close elections such as the presidential election in 2016.

## **Candidates**

There were six contenders for president, who received the required 6,000 supporting signatures to be fielded as a candidate. Not all of them ran under a party label. Besides the official candidates of the country's three largest parties—the Social Democratic Party of Austria (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*, SPÖ), the Austrian People's Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei*, ÖVP) and the Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ)—one candidate running as an independent was nonetheless a member of and backed by the Greens (*Die Grünen*). Two additional candidates organized and financed their campaigns entirely independently of political parties.

The first candidate to announce her candidature and the only woman in the race was the independent Irmgard Griss. A retired judge and former president of the Austrian Supreme Court of Justice (*Oberster Gerichtshof*), Griss became known to a wider public in 2014 when she directed

an independent commission investigating the controversial nationalization of the troubled banking institution *Hypo Alpe Adria*. Following favourable appraisals of her conduct, she announced her candidature as a break with the tight and increasingly ill-reputed grip of the established parties over the political system. In the course of the campaign, the upstart liberal party NEOS, represented in parliament since 2013, endorsed Griss but without offering her material support. Unusually for Austrian elections, the campaign was thus funded exclusively from private donations, which were made transparent online.

Second to enter the contest was Alexander Van der Bellen, leader of the Greens from 1997 to 2008 and, more recently, a member of the Viennese municipal council under a local Social Democrat–Green coalition until 2015. A university economist before entering politics, Van der Bellen was widely credited for uniting and professionalizing the party and making it accessible to new voters, so that it exceeded 10% of votes in a federal election for the first time in 2006. Officially he ran as an independent, although organizationally and financially he was backed by the Greens, a move that caused some public controversy.

As expected, the governing parties of the SPÖ–ÖVP ‘Grand Coalition’ each nominated their own candidate. In accordance with their dominant status, all previous presidents since 1945 have been recruited or supported by one of the two parties. The Christian-democratic ÖVP nominated Andreas Khol, President of the National Council (*Nationalrat*)—the lower chamber of parliament—between 2002 and 2006, as their candidate. Known as a staunch conservative, Khol was seen as a surprise nominee after the expected candidate Erwin Pröll, the long-serving head of government in the state of Lower Austria, declined to run. The SPÖ announced Rudolf Hundstorfer, a former trade union leader, as their nominee. Most recently, Hundstorfer was a member of the government

prior to the election campaign as the Federal Minister for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection—a position he took back in 2008.

The nationalist and right-wing populist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) nominated Norbert Hofer, the Third President of the National Council (*Nationalrat*)—the highest public office held by an FPÖ politician. Born in 1971, Hofer was by far the youngest candidate in the field and significantly under the usual age for presidents and presidential candidates in Austria.<sup>2</sup> The final and distinctively outsider candidate was the 83-year-old Richard Lugner, an independent wealthy construction entrepreneur, and a well-known figure in Austrian society and media. This was Lugner's second attempt at the presidency, after he had won a respectable 9.91% of the votes in 1998.

## **Campaign**

The large number of contestants, compared to previous presidential elections, and the heated political climate in the country promised an unusually controversial campaign. The arrival and treatment of refugees from mainly Syria and Afghanistan had been, as in much of Europe, at the centre of political debates since the summer of 2015. While the Austrian government at first followed Germany in its response to humanitarian concerns and pushed for a European solution, it changed course at the beginning of 2016 with the adoption of an annual ceiling for asylum applications and the construction of fences at highly frequented border crossings.

While these measures were in line with the demands of the right-wing FPÖ, their candidate Norbert Hofer nonetheless continuously attacked the government's handling of the refugee crisis. On the other end of the spectrum, the Green candidate Van der Bellen stressed the need for a humane and constructive European response to the crisis. The candidates of ÖVP and in particular

the SPÖ had difficulties in prevailing on this issue as they had to defend the government's ambiguous policy against attacks from both left and right. Beyond this critical issue, opinion polls have continuously showed the FPÖ in the lead in voting intention for federal elections and overall low satisfaction with government performance.

In the run-up to the presidential election the polls were volatile and thus only partially reliable. However, most polls indicated higher vote shares for Van der Bellen, Griss and Hofer than for the government candidates Hundstorfer and Khol. For the first time, it became imaginable that the future president would not be the nominee of one of the two main pillars of Austria's post-war political system, the SPÖ and ÖVP. As a consequence, a debate about the president's constitutional powers and the appropriate ways to use them took shape. Traditionally, the office was characterized by the custom of *Rollenverzicht*, signifying that the president abstained from using their constitutional powers and remained in a procedural role above everyday party politics. This is important since a constitutional reform in 1929 provided the president with extensive powers in the appointment and dismissal of the government, giving the system strong *formal* presidential elements similar to the ideal-typical semi-presidential French constitution (Helms and Wineroither, 2012: 149–51).

In the ensuing debate, several of the candidates vowed to take on a more active role than that of previous officeholders. In particular, the announcements of the FPÖ and Green candidates proved controversial. Hofer repeatedly stated his willingness to dismiss the government if it did not act upon his requests in, for instance, questions of security and immigration. Van der Bellen, on the other hand, took a firm stand when he declared himself not ready to appoint Heinz-Christian Strache, the leader of the populist FPÖ, as chancellor if his party came first in the next parliamentary elections. This was criticized as undemocratic, but Van der Bellen argued that his

mandate as directly elected president would allow him to judge the FPÖ's anti-EU course a threat to Austrian national interests. Besides the European dimension of the refugee crisis, the EU thus also became a topic of the campaign in this way and pitted Europhile and Eurosceptic position against each other.

In contrast, the SPÖ and ÖVP candidates stressed their intention to act as stabilizing and impartial forces when elected to office and pointed to their extensive political experience in a number of roles. Besides these disputes, one notable point of agreement was the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) treaty currently under negotiation between the US government and the European Commission, which was criticized by all candidates (Der Standard, 26 March 2016).

Once the candidates for the second round were decided, the dynamics already visible in the first stage of the campaign intensified. With Van der Bellen and Hofer, two candidates with clearly opposing profiles faced each other. Hofer's line was—in accordance with his party—characterized by a classical TAN (traditional—authoritarian—nationalist) outlook on the questions of immigration, globalization and European integration. Van der Bellen, on the other hand, was the candidate of progressive GAL (green—alternative—libertarian) constituencies. In this sense, the contest was fought along the lines of what is commonly understood as 'new politics', politicizing issues of identity and post-materialism rather than the classical socio-economic left—right scale (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). However, the campaign also took on a classical populist dimension, as Hofer portrayed Van der Bellen as the candidate of the pro-European, culturally liberal elites, while he claimed to stand up for 'the people'.

## **Results**



The campaign ended with one of the closest presidential elections in recent memory. Table 1 presents the results of the election, showing that Van der Bellen won the race with only 30,863 votes more than Hofer in the second round of election. In other words, the election split the nation down the middle with less than 0.5% of registered voters determining the president in 2016. Such a close result is even more surprising in Austria, where presidential elections are known to be rather predictable. The incumbent Heinz Fischer, for example, had won the previous election in 2010 with almost 80% of the votes. Indeed, this was the first time since 1992 that an absolute majority could not be achieved in the first round of elections.

The first round was marked by the failure of the centre-party candidates as much as by the success of Norbert Hofer. The FPÖ candidate proved all but one opinion poll wrong by winning 35.1% of the votes, higher than any other candidate in the first round. Former Greens leader Alexander Van der Bellen followed Hofer with 21.3% of the votes, making it into the second round to face him. Missing this opportunity was the independent Irmgard Griss, who earned the support of 18.9% of the voters. The candidates of the SPÖ and ÖVP won only 11% of the votes each. This result was shocking enough for two reasons. First, it showed that a right-wing populist candidate could become president in a European country, a reason strong enough to ‘ring alarm bells across the continent’ (The Guardian, 25 April 2016). Second, it meant that the parties that had shared the presidential post between themselves since 1945 were out of the race for the first time.

**Table 1.** Results of the presidential election in Austria, 2016.

	<u>First Round</u>		<u>Second Round</u>	
	Votes	%	Votes	%
<u>Candidates</u>				
Norbert Hofer	1,499,971	35.1	2,220,654	49.7
Alexander Van der Bellen	913,218	21.3	2,251,517	50.3
Irmgard Griss	810,641	18.9		
Rudolf Hundstorfer	482,790	11.3		
Andreas Khol	475,767	11.1		
Richard Lugner	96,783	2.3		
<u>Other Results</u>				
Registered voters	6,382,507		6,382,507	
Turnout	4,371,825	68.5	4,637,046	72.7
Invalid Votes	92,655	2.1	164,875	3.6
Valid Votes	4,279,170	97.9	4,472,171	96.4

*Source:* The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (www.bmi.gv.at).

The effects of the latter were felt in Austrian politics even before the second round. On 9 May, two weeks after the first round of election, Chancellor Werner Faymann resigned as head of government and leader of the SPÖ. Faymann cited losing support of his party as the reason behind this sudden resignation—a trend worsened by the disappointing results from the first round of election (The Guardian, 9 May 2016). The SPÖ nominated the chief of Austria’s Railway Company, Christian Kern, as the new chancellor, and he was sworn in with less than a week to go before the second round of the presidential election. The grand coalition with the ÖVP remained intact. Neither of these parties in government officially endorsed a candidate in the second round.

After the surprising elimination of the candidates of the main centre-left and centre-right parties,

as well as of the two independent contenders, the second round saw a face-off between Norbert Hofer of the FPÖ and Alexander Van der Bellen backed by the Greens. Thus the two final presidential candidates were both established party politicians, but neither had ever held executive office. They had very little in common. Indeed, the Austrian Greens and FPÖ take opposing positions on many policy issues (Aichholzer *et al.*, 2014). Perhaps the only thing they had in common was their percentage of votes in the end: Van der Bellen and Hofer had 50.3% and 49.7% of the votes respectively.

However, it was not immediately clear who won the election. The closeness with which the election was decided created a dramatic and tense period of waiting until the absentee ballot had been counted by Monday afternoon. On the night of the second round, Hofer had a lead of 3.8 percentage points according to the provisional results from the direct votes in ballot boxes. The counting was paused until the following day, 23 May 2016, which was allocated for the ballots posted by the voters. Throughout the counting of the absentee ballot, regularly updated results documented how Van der Bellen gradually caught up with his opponent. The absentee ballot proved to be a game-changer as it significantly favoured Van der Bellen, who closed the gap and won the election with under 0.5% of the registered voters more than Hofer.

The turnout increased slightly between the rounds, and 72.7% of the registered voters cast their ballot in the run-off. Prior to the presidential election in 2016, Austria had been having turnout problems (Dolezal and Zeglovits, 2014). First, a historic-low 53.6% turned out to vote in the presidential election in 2010. This was followed by another record low this time for legislative elections in 2013 with a turnout of 74.9%. Although low turnout figures are characteristic features of second-order elections like the presidential ones (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), 72.7% was comparable with the 2013 figure and this was generally perceived as a positive outcome. This

election contest has been held under levels of politicization unusual for Austrian presidential elections. The unpredictability of the results of an unlikely race and the clear contrast of two candidates of the left and the right mobilized more voters to turn out. Surveys showed that in particular among the second- round voters of Van der Bellen, many stated an intention to deny the presidency to the far right as their primary motive.

### **A Country Divided? Territorial Dynamics in the Election Outcome**

The post-election analyses highlighted a number of divides that cut across the country to determine voting behaviour. Media reports routinely spoke of a ‘divided country’ in this context. According to election day surveys, a number of sociological factors proved strong determinants of vote choice in the second round. The picture that emerged showed an electorate strongly divided along levels of education, occupation and gender (Der Standard, 22 May 2016). Among voters with higher education, Van der Bellen gained 81% of the votes, but only 33% among those with vocational training. Most strikingly, 86% of manual workers cast their votes for Hofer. In addition, we observe a relatively smaller yet considerable gender gap in voting behaviour. Among women, the Green candidate prevailed with 60% of votes, while the figures for male voters produce the exact opposite picture (Der Standard, 22 May 2016). While these numbers are based on surveys with small samples conducted on election day and may thus not be fully reliable, they confirm trends that have been observed in Austria and elsewhere in recent years (Plasser and Ulram, 2008: 65–70; Kriesi *et al.*, 2012).

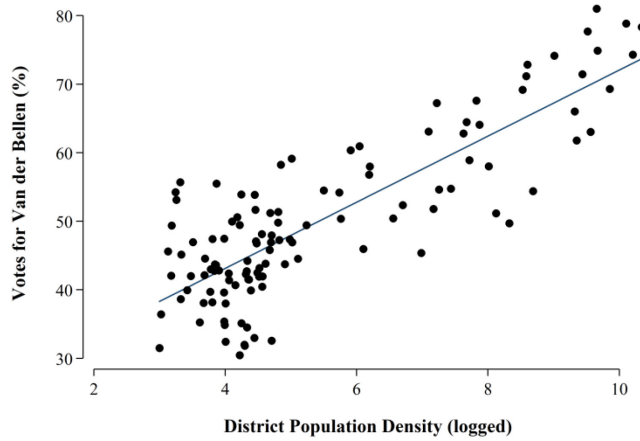
These findings are also linked to two geographical divides at play. The first is an apparent urban–rural divide across the country. The results show that Van der Bellen won in 37 out of the 40 most densely populated districts of Austria. The only exceptions were Krems (*Land*) in Lower

Austria, Villach (*Stadt*) in Carinthia and Simmering in Vienna. Van der Bellen almost won the latter as well, but eventually fell short with 49.7% of the votes in this district. As Figure 1 shows, Van der Bellen's vote share indeed grows steadily with the degree of urbanization of a district, measured by population density and population growth. Van der Bellen did not simply win in urban districts; he won with a higher percentage of votes in more densely populated and faster growing districts.

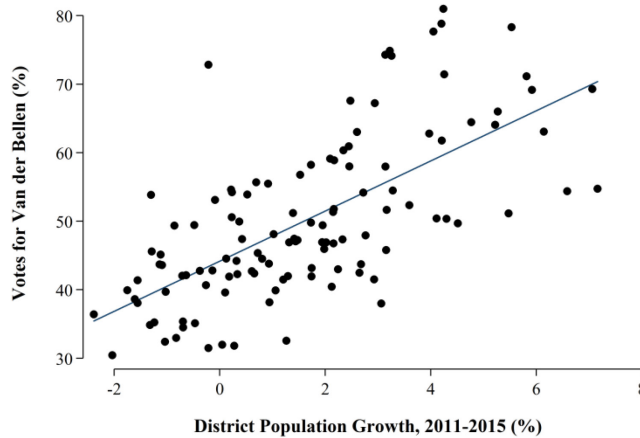
Linking sociological and regional dynamics may provide the basis for an explanation. Urban areas attract populations with ongoing or completed higher education, while many rural areas record negative demographical trends. It was found that particularly young women (who turned out for Van der Bellen with 67%, according to the cited survey) show a tendency to move from the countryside to the cities, leaving a surplus of men in rural districts (Kurier, 29 May 2016). Figure 1b indeed indicates that districts with a negative rate of population growth report consistently low vote shares for the Green candidate, frequently in the range between 30% and 40%.

The urban–rural divide represents one of the traditional cleavages in Austrian politics. Traditionally, the country's industrialized urban areas have voted left, while the rural areas were dominated by conservative forces, mostly due to Catholic and farming constituencies (Luther and Müller, 1992). The divide is slightly altered but not fundamentally transformed in this particular contest. The Green candidate has replaced the respective social democrat as the standard bearer of the urbanized left, while the FPÖ candidate won over the traditionally conservative constituencies in the countryside. One particularly interesting aspect stressed by commentators is Hofer's disappointing result in the capital city of Vienna, where he suffered a crushing defeat with 36.7% of votes compared to Van der Bellen's 63.3%. This is all the more

(a)



(b)



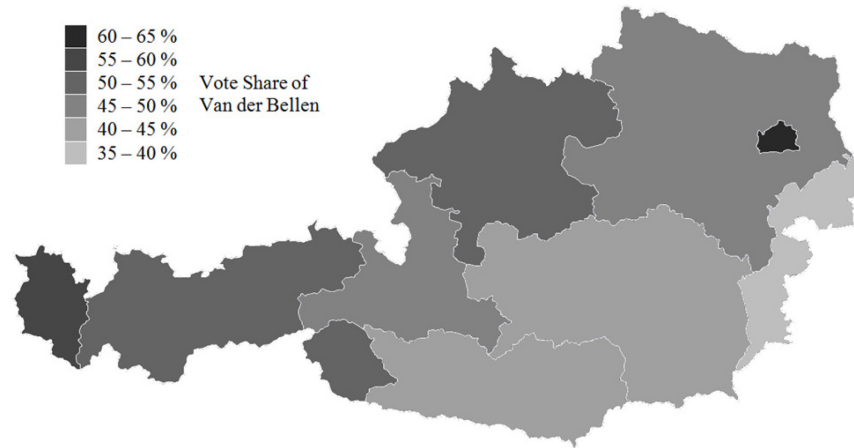
**Figure 1.** Correlation between vote share of Van der Bellen in the second round and district demographics: (a) population density and (b) population growth rate. *Source:* The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and Statistik Austria ([www.statistik.at](http://www.statistik.at)).

striking as previously ‘the FPÖ has been characterised as a relatively urban party’ (Aichholzer *et al.*, 2014: 119) that draws support from constituencies traditionally linked to social democracy rather than from the traditionally conservative ones. Therefore, Vienna has for long been seen as the main battleground between the SPÖ and the FPÖ, most recently in the regional elections of October 2015. The results of this election thus suggest a party realignment in relation to the urban–

rural cleavage, with the FPÖ now significantly stronger in rural than urban areas.

As a second territorial divide, we also find a more surprising south-east– north-west disparity in support for the candidates with the exception of the capital city, Vienna.<sup>3</sup> As Figure 2 shows, Van der Bellen received a majority of votes in the two westernmost provinces of Vorarlberg (58.6%) and Tyrol (51.4%), as well as in Upper Austria (51.3%) in the north, while his weakest results were in the eastern and southern provinces of Burgenland (38.6%), Styria (43.8%) and Carinthia (41.9%). In contrast to the above urban–rural divide, a comparison across provinces shows a different picture: The western provinces that are known as conservative strongholds with a traditionally weak left have produced a Green majority. On the other hand, the three mentioned regions with the strongest FPÖ result saw the social democrats win a plurality of votes in the last regional elections.

One element of the explanation seems to lie in the fact that Norbert Hofer is a resident of the eastern province of Burgenland, while Alexander Van der Bellen hails from an alpine valley town in Tyrol. Beyond this personal element, the state of Styria in the country's south-east, is an instructive case for the observed transformation of the Austrian party system. Traditionally dominated by the Christian-democratic ÖVP, the region nonetheless has a sizeable working class base and social-democratic tradition due to the existence of a number of old heavy-industrial towns. Beginning in the 2000s, the province became a battleground in which the ÖVP, the SPÖ and even the FPÖ have in turn managed to win a plurality of votes. This increased electoral volatility points to an ongoing *dealignment* of both working class and rural constituencies, both of which leaned towards the FPÖ candidate in the present presidential election.



**Figure 2.** Vote share of Van der Bellen by states in Austria in the second round. *Source:* The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior.

### Concluding Discussion

The Austrian presidential election 2016 generated an unusual amount of controversy and interest, within but also beyond the country’s borders. As a result, ‘one of Europe’s most steadfastly dull countries has suddenly turned interesting’ in the run-up to the decisive second round of the ballot (The Economist, 21 May 2016), and international media was eager to cover and analyse the results. There are a number of reasons for this interest, some of which should also draw the attention of political scientists.

A difference of less than 0.5% of the voters made Austria the first Western European country with a Green rather than a far-right head of state. Given these drastically different potential fates, the result was widely seen a ‘disaster narrowly averted’ (The Guardian, 23 May 2016), and both Austria *and* Europe ‘dodged a bullet’ (The Economist, 28 May 2016). Behind these claims stands



the anxiety about the rise of far-right populist, Eurosceptic and xenophobic parties across Europe, of which the Austrian Freedom Party is one highly successful example. There is however also a distinct quality to the political success of the FPÖ. In contrast to most populist parties, it has a long tradition, dating back to the nineteenth century. Its roots lay in the pan-Germanic and often anti-Semitic ‘national-liberalism’ of the imperial period, which was absorbed into the Austrian offshoot of Nazism in the inter-war period. The FPÖ was founded in 1956 by the remnants of this political camp and has to this day struggled with right-wing extremist activities within its ranks. This contributed to the decision of the other members of European Union to impose sanctions on the Austrian government when the FPÖ first entered into a coalition government with the ÖVP in 2000 (Pelinka, 2002).

This unusual election is thus of wider importance for students of Austrian and European politics. For Austria, one of the most remarkable aspects is undoubtedly the first-round debacle suffered by the candidates of the powerful social-democratic and Christian-democratic parties. Irmgard Griss, an independent candidate with neither previous political experience nor any party support, managed to outperform the SPÖ and ÖVP candidates by wide margins. At the same time, the candidates of the Green and populist right opposition parties came out as the two frontrunners. In a country with a stable political culture and political parties historically entrenched in society, this large movement of voters is a remarkable occurrence and points to a deep transformation of the party system.

The second round saw candidates supported by parties that are strongly characterized by their ‘new politics’ profile. How this contest played out can give us insights into a development that is underway in many European countries. The Greens traditionally mobilize voters on the basis of post-materialist concerns such as ecology, gender equality and minority rights, while the FPÖ

speaks to identity concerns in the face of rapid social change. The SPÖ and ÖVP have, in contrast, remained strongly wedded to their traditional core constituencies and the corresponding interest groups. Austria thus presents a nearly ideal-typical case of the transformation of European cleavage structures, in which a new conflict dimension animated by European integration, economic globalization and migration gains ground at the expense of the old class conflict (Kriesi *et al.*, 2006). Accordingly, the electorate was sharply divided in the second round in three ways. First, education levels, occupation and gender proved important division lines, akin to the thesis of cleavage transformation. While the second-order nature of presidential elections does not allow us to draw definite conclusions, the clearly visible sociological patterns nonetheless point to more fundamental underlying developments. Second, we observe a reinvigorated rural–urban divide, with Alexander Van der Bellen carrying most of the country’s cities but trailing Norbert Hofer in the countryside. Third, a regional south-east–north-west disparity in vote shares for the two candidates emerged in the election. While it is too early to make judgements about its durability and causes, this suggests that Austrian regions are differentially exposed to European integration due to their vicinity to socio-economically highly disparate EU members. This reminds us that the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalization are unequally divided not only sociologically *but also regionally*.

## Notes

1. Eventually, there emerged a third feature that makes this election unprecedented. On 1 July 2016, while this article was in production, the Austrian Constitutional Court ruled that the second round of the election was to be repeated in its entirety in all of Austria. While there was no indication of any electoral fraud, the Court found some procedural mistakes in the way the absentee

ballots were counted in a number of districts. In addition, the Court ruled that the transmission of partial results to the media before the closing of the election, despite being a common practice in Austria, violated the principle of free elections. The rerun of the second round between Alexander Van der Bellen and Norbert Hofer has been set for 2 October 2016. For further details on the ruling of the Constitutional Court, see their press release on [https://www.vfgh.gv.at/cms/vfgh-site/attachments/9/6/5/CH0003/CMS1467363707042/press\\_release\\_07-01-16.pdf](https://www.vfgh.gv.at/cms/vfgh-site/attachments/9/6/5/CH0003/CMS1467363707042/press_release_07-01-16.pdf).

2. Indeed, when asked if he would stand as a candidate in the election during a TV interview before the campaign, Hofer's first reaction was that he felt too young to be the president. Tellingly, all former presidents of Austria were deceased at the time of election in 2016, excluding the incumbent Heinz Fischer.

3. In addition to being a city—the capital and the largest—in the country, Vienna is at the same time one of the nine states of Austria.

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